

Home Life on Early Ranches of Southwest Texas

CHAPTER XXI

Middleton Moore Bradford
Edwards County



MRS. S. A. HOUGH

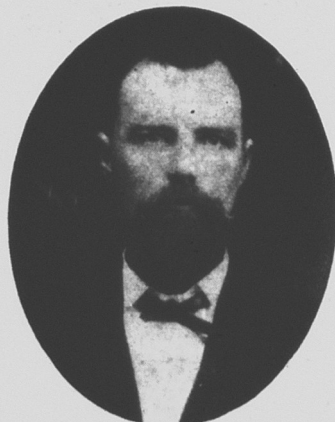
Holding a branding iron used by her father, M. M. Bradford, in 1879, and she said "I do not know how long previous to that year." It consists of two "M's" with the bottoms turned toward each other.

MIDDLETON Moore Bradford came from Mississippi to Texas just after the Civil War. So many of the early settlers came because of glowing reports of the wonderful opportunities in the new country, or to help Texas fight for her independence. But Middleton Bradford was not motivated by either of these worthy ambitions.

Young Bradford was too young to enter the army. Having been reared on a large plantation, he was left in charge of a large number of slaves when his father, Captain A. M. Bradford, enlisted in the first Mississippi volunteer. He died during the war.

When the war was over and the carpetbaggers came, the slaves in that section became very unruly. The Bradfords continued to feed and care for their slaves. One day a big, burly former slave attacked Middleton's grandfather, Major M. Bradford, which resulted in the youthful grandson—now about sixteen years of age—cutting him severely. Although he felt justified in punishing the negro to defend his grandfather he felt he was disgraced. According to the lofty standards of the Bradfords, hand should not be laid upon their slaves. Heretofore, they had been ruled by reason and kindness. So he took a brace of pistols, his father's watch, saddle and horse and set out for Texas.

It was a long, interesting journey. He had been trained by the best tutors available. He could read Latin and Greek and was well versed in English and art. Viewing the beauty of the country gradually helped ease the pain of disgrace. Shortly after entering Texas, he fell in with a young man who was a very interesting traveling companion. They spent a night at the same place. The next morning the young man had disappeared, and with him, Middleton's watch and pistols.



M. M. BRADFORD

He stopped at Galveston and worked with a shipping crew, loading cattle for three years. After that, he came to Goliad and taught school in that county. While there, he met an interesting family by the name of Shanklin. Mr. Shanklin had large ranch holdings in Lampasas, but was ranching in Goliad county during the reconstruction period. His daughter, Kate, was attending school in Lampasas. She came home engaged to be married. When Middleton Moore Bradford and Kate Dixon Shanklin met they were naturally attracted to each other. She, too, had received the best educational opportunities of that time. He was nearly a perfect specimen of physical manhood, cultured and very interested in Texas. She was a cultured gentle woman. They married in 1872 and started ranching in Goliad county.

The cattle industry appealed to Mr. Bradford. The cattle baron was a more lordly person in many respects than the great cotton planters in Mississippi. More medieval, to be sure, not so polished, not so elegant in dress or manner, but his power in his domain was as great as that of the cotton planter. His brand was his coat of arms. For three generations, the Bradfords had ruled over the lordly cotton plantations. Until the war, he accepted the loyalty of the slaves as a matter of course. But the loyalty of the clean, intelligent, cowboys toward their boss appeared to young Bradford as one of the finest relationships that one could desire.

The rapidly increasing cattle kingdom was already bigger than the cotton kingdom. The nucleus of a herd was easy to acquire. Cattle were reasonably cheap, and the "wild" ones were to be had for the taking.

Goliad had become the first "stocker market." Grass was free and plentiful. Because of the mild climate, little tending was necessary, to be sure cattle had to be driven in great herds to the markets in Kansas, but the prospect of going "up the trail" fascinated young Bradford. Trails had already been established. Trail driving was rapidly becoming a science, if not an art. The drovers already knew the number of cattle that could be man-

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aged easily and efficiently, yet be an economical unit. They knew the number of cowboys necessary to manage it, the number of mounts required for each man; the best way to manage the *remuda*, the kind of chuck wagon to use; the type and amount of food to carry; how to direct the daily movements of the herd; how to "bed down" and control the herd at night; what to do in time of stampedes and storm; and how to swim the swollen streams.

Young Bradford had directed the care of the work animals used by the slaves on his father's plantation as a matter of course, but he was fascinated with the prospect of managing large herds of cattle. The power of the cowboy to soothe the animals when restless at night by singing to them appealed to his sense of rhythm and love of music. His skill in controlling a stampede on a dark, blustery night by getting the leaders of the herd to run in a circle until eventually the whole herd was "milling" was a supreme accomplishment. How he would have revelled in the great improved purebreds of today!

"Everything turns out for the best" is an old saying, yet certainly this was true in the case of Mr. Bradford because of the Bradford's traditional feeling of responsibility to care for their slaves, even though they were freed; young Bradford probably would not have come to Texas, but because of his difficulty with the ex-slave he did come to Texas. He learned the cattle business. His marriage to Kate Dixon Shanklin was paramount accomplishment, he thought. They shared their affection with three children, Annie Laura, Ellen Wilcox, and William M. Bradford.

Mrs. Bradford was becoming more fragile. His first consideration always was for her welfare and happiness. His evenings at home with the entire family



MRS. KATE S. BRADFORD

around the fireside was a joy for all. While the children played, he and Mrs. Bradford talked and planned. His great ambition was to own large herds of cattle and sufficient land for grazing. He had heard of the great opportunities for the cattle industry on the Edwards Plateau. Both he and Mrs. Bradford were interested in moving there.

The opportunity for starting in the cattle business on his own came when Mr. Bradford brought a herd of cattle known as the "Taylor herd" to Ben Ficklin in 1879. According to his contract, he was to brand every third heifer and every fourth steer for himself for the next five years.

He left his family with her relatives in Belton that year. But he was eager to be with his wife and children again,

so in 1880 he decided to move his family to "700 Springs."

Mrs. Bradford enjoyed the visit with her relatives. The children listened, spellbound, while the older people told stories of their childhood days. Grandma Shanklin (Mrs. Bradford's grandmother) told of the time, prior to the surrender of the Southern Army, when Jefferson Davis made a secret trip to Texas, and was an honored guest in her two-story brick home near the old Shanklin mill there in Bell county. The Shanklin family were close friends of the Jefferson Davis family before coming to Texas and before the Civil War. They learned, also, that their father's ancestry dated back to Governor Bradford of Massachusetts. These and many other stories were just "good stories" to the children, then.

But later, they became prized bits of family history.

Mrs. Bradford and the children had enjoyed their stay with relatives. But their happiness was boundless when Mr. Bradford arrived and said he could take them with him to their new home. Preparations for moving were made quickly.

They left Belton in a covered wagon drawn by a big team of horses. Mrs. Bradford was practically an invalid now. So their journey would be slow, but as comfortable as could be expected for that day and time. They camped near Florence the first night. But, when they woke up the next morning, everything was slick with a thin covering of ice. It was getting colder every minute.

Mr. Bradford felt that he could not afford to take his wife through such terrible weather. A family by the name of Barber received them into their home with the gracious hospitality that was typical of that time. The large, lovely house of the Barbers had big, roaring fires in huge fireplaces in each end of the spacious rooms. One of the boys was fixing to get married, recalls Mrs. Annie Laura Bradford Hough, the eldest daughter of the Bradfords who gave me the information for this story. Crowds of happy laughing young people came and went. Mrs. Barber placed Mrs. Bradford in a room where she could keep warm and rest. One of the Barber girls brought in her trousseau for her to see.

But after a week of bad weather, the skies became clear again. The Bradfords bade the Barbers good-bye and again started on their journey.

When they arrived at "700 Springs" their house was not completed, so they spent a week at Beeman ranch home. But the ranchmen came in and helped build the log house with one big room and a lean-to to be used as a kitchen and dining room with dirt floors. It was soon finished, but the Bradford family thought it was a wonderful house. The Beemans living nearby in a two-story log house and some cowboys on the Beeman ranch were their neighbors.

Mrs. Bradford's younger brother, who was not very well, had come along to stay with Mrs. Bradford, so she would not have to stay alone with the children when her husband was away, and to help with the work, but not either of the men could make bread. Her brother would bring her the materials and she made the bread in a bowl on her lap. The children carried the water from "700 Springs."

Later Mr. Bradford bought a ranch on Contrary Creek in what is now Edwards county. So at last he owned herds of cattle and owned a ranch! The family was so eager to move onto their own place that he dug a well, put up a tent, and the family moved in. Later a picket house was built by sticking in the ground cedar pickets very close together. The roof was made of hand-hewn boards. Several years later a box house was built. But the tents were kept for the men to sleep in, and the "picket house" was used for a "smoke house." Still later, they built a story and a half house from lumber brought from Kerrville.

Mr. Bradford usually went to San Antonio twice a year to buy supplies, including groceries. He brought back coffee, flour, sugar, salt, canned goods including canned milk, and dried fruit. They did not raise a garden, but they had a good variety of meat, wild turkey, deer and beef. It usually took Mr. Bradford a week to ten days to make the trip to



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San Antonio and back. Later, he and the family shopped in Junction.

Mr. Bradford built a house in Junction so Mrs. Bradford could live there during the school term and send the children to school. But they were always glad to return to the ranch when school was out. Some of the children later attended school in Rocksprings.

The nearest neighbor was eight miles away. The nearest doctor was twenty miles away, but the Bradford family did not object to isolation. The children were taught to entertain themselves. They read magazines that a friend gathered up and brought to them. The "Lady Goady book" was their favorite.

As the children grew older, young people visited them frequently. Neighbor boys and girls came Sunday afternoons to play dominoes. They usually "went to bed with the chickens" but on Sunday nights they were permitted to sit up until ten o'clock. Occasionally they made trips to Junction, going up one day and returning the next.

There were two great social events they looked forward to each year. One was the picnic on July 4. Everybody came with well filled dinner baskets. Sometimes they camped for two days and nights. Dancing was the main entertainment. The other great occasion was the dance during Christmas. These dances were sometimes held in the school houses or under brush arbors. Music was furnished by one or two fiddlers and everybody danced. After the dances, sometimes the cowboys would shoot out the lights. The girls would sometimes help with "the shooting" of the lights, recalls Mrs. Hough.

But perhaps the greatest social occasions were the weddings. Big tables would be spread all around the house. They were literally covered with baked turkey, boiled hams, cakes and pies. Coffee steamed in big pots near by. After the wedding, they ate supper. Then, they danced all night, and every one ate any time he was hungry. The neighbors helped to cook the supper.

The neighbors nursed each other when they were sick. Mr. Benton, one of the neighbors, made the pine coffins. A great saying in the community was "he builds houses for people to live in and coffins to plant them in."

Mrs. Bradford did the sewing for the family by hand. But in 1883 the first sewing machine was bought. Mrs. Bradford was too weak to turn so the children took time about turning it for her, while she guided it. Crude to be sure, but it lightened the burden of the family sewing for her.

Mrs. Bradford was a very religious woman. Reading the Bible was a daily habit with her. In the morning after Mr. Bradford and the cowboys had gone to work, she would take the children down into a hollow near the house and prayed with them. This hollow was thickly spotted with cedar covered grape vines. When the vines were covered with numerous clusters of grapes against the background of green cedars, it formed a picture that the children never forgot. "It is the garden of Eden," declared Mr. Bradford, the first time he saw it. Their big dog was always near to protect them from the foxes. It was both a safe retreat and a hallowed spot where Mrs. Bradford felt very near her Creator, and was comforted by His presence.

And while Mrs. Bradford was taking care of the household, Mr. Bradford was rapidly expanding his cattle holdings. He

bought and sold cattle for a firm in Kansas City. Then, he bought cattle for Hildebrandt in San Antonio. Later, he bought cattle and took them up the trail to Abilene and Dodge City, Kansas. Taking the cattle up the trail and caring for them was even more fascinating than he thought it would be years ago when he started to learn the cattle business in Goliad.

There were no fences at first. The cattle had a tendency to drift toward the Rio Grande during the cold winters, so he with other nearby ranchmen would take chuck wagons and gather up the strayed cattle. On the return trip the cattle would be cut out as they arrived at the home ranch. These were hard, tedious trips that would last for months. In order to avoid them, the ranchmen tried to

herd the cattle to prevent their drifting so far south. But enough of the cattle managed to drift southward, so the long, tiresome trip had to be repeated.

But when the sheepmen came, fences had to be built. Then, there were difficulties between the sheepmen and the cattlemen. "I have taken my rifle many times and ordered the Mexican herder to keep his sheep on the other side of the hill," said Mrs. Annie Laura Bradford Hough.

These trips were not only hard on Mr. Bradford, but he was very concerned about Mrs. Bradford's health. She was getting more frail all the time. Thinking perhaps the trip would do her good, he consented to her taking the children and going for a visit to her parents in Goliad county. During her visit there,



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she became quite ill and had to undergo an operation. She got along splendidly for about three weeks, then she relapsed and died suddenly. Methods of communication and transportation were slow so the mother, only thirty-five years of age, was buried in Goliad without her husband seeing her again. "They worshipped each other. If they ever quarreled, we did not know it," declared Mrs. Hough.

The children, Annie Laura, Ellen Wilcox, and William M. remained with Mrs. Bradford's mother six months. Then, Mr. Bradford came after them. Their Grandmother Shanklin came home with them and remained with them a month.

Although Mr. Bradford and the children were heartbroken, gradually they resumed their normally cheerful habits of living. They were happy and busy keeping house, washing and ironing. The wash pots were kept at the river. They ironed with sad irons.

Annie Laura, the eldest child, had always been her father's "right hand helper." She could ride as well as any cowboy on the ranch. Mr. Bradford raised horses. He bought a Kentucky-bred stallion to mate with his Spanish mares. The present Mrs. Hough would round them up about once a week. There were seventy-five geldings at one time. They had to be kept separated from the mares.

"I would get on my pony 'Button' bareback or on a side saddle, lie down on his back, put my heels in his flanks," states Mrs. Hough. The stallion would raise his head and take his mares straight home.

Later, Mr. Bradford married his wife's younger sister, Mary Shanklin. They lived in the community that had been home to Mr. Bradford until his death in 1889.

Mr. Bradford was buried in Rocksprings.

Annie Laura married Sam A. Hough of Edwards county, who was county clerk there for nearly thirty years. She was appointed to succeed him and held the office for two terms. She has probably lived continuously in Edwards county longer than any other person.

Ellen Wilcox, the second daughter, married H. H. Winn. They are ranching on the Hackberry near Rocksprings.

William M. Bradford, the third child, married Nan Henderson. They live on a ranch near Rocksprings. One of his father's branding irons is one of his prized possessions.

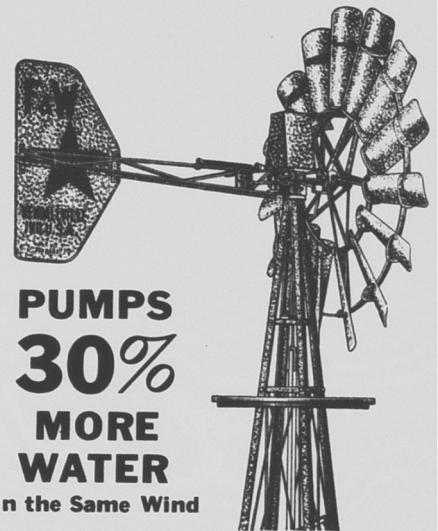
Children of Mr. Bradford by his second wife were: Mrs. Sallie Bradford Henderson, and lives at Ingram; Wheat L. Bradford married Maude Yett, and lives on a ranch near Rocksprings; and Guy Bradford of Ingram.



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